

Can't and Won't by MicrosuedeMouse

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Family, Hurt/Comfort, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler

Relationships: Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Mike Wheeler & Nancy Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-08-06

Updated: 2016-08-06

Packaged: 2022-03-31 22:29:43

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,760

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Mike and Nancy confide in each other because their parents can't know, will never know. At first they only talk about their grief. Later they talk about other things. Eventually Mike sees again how uncomfortable Steve makes his sister sometimes, and he talks to her about Jonathan. He can't follow his feelings any more but she can and just... won't.

Can't and Won't

Author's Note:

Another from vacation. Soon, I promise, I will bring you some plain, non-angsty, instant-gratification fluff. In the meantime, enjoy.

In the weeks following their ordeal, Mike and Nancy quickly learned that they needed each other. Nancy may have needed her brother more than he needed her, really – he, at least, had his friends to talk to. She wasn't so lucky. But he was, at his core, a good kid, and he recognized how much she needed his company, even if she *was* his rotten older sister. And they couldn't talk to their parents about everything they'd been through.

It took them a while to get the hang of it. At first it was silent, physical comfort they provided each other. A soft, private hug when they saw that familiar look in the other's eyes. Company late at night after one or the other woke with a yelp from their latest nightmare. Sitting together on quiet days when there was little to occupy their thoughts.

After a while they finally learned to talk. It started with gentle questions, each trying to fill in the gaps and the parts they'd missed. Everyone knew the whole story in a rough sense by now; Hopper had gotten everyone together to hash it out and discuss their vow of silence. But they each had questions, things they had missed or still wanted clarified. Eventually conversation turned to grief. They talked about Barb and Eleven; about their friendships, about everything they loved and missed about their lost companions. They bonded over their inability to put their grief to rest somewhere – Mike held his sister as she cried over the best friend she could never bury, the best friend whose parents could never even know what had happened. Whom nearly everyone believed to have run away.

Together they at least managed to cycle some of the pain out of their systems. Refresh themselves. In the spirit of their no-more-secrets agreement they began to talk about other things as well, finding that they both strangely enjoyed this newfound closeness. She even

confided in him, occasionally, about her relationship with Steve. She rarely voiced her doubts, but she didn't have to; Mike could easily see them when she talked about him. It was clear that she was uncertain. And it was no real mystery to him why.

It was one evening mid-February when Mike stopped halfway up the basement stairs. He could hear Nancy and Steve in the front hall, clearly tense. He crept up to the door and listened.

"Steve, just go home," Nancy was saying. She sounded tired.

"No, Nancy, I wanna talk about this. I didn't mean it. I'm sorry," Steve was insisting.

"I *don't* wanna talk about it," Nancy answered candidly, her patience obviously running thin. "It was mean. It wasn't an okay thing for you to say and I don't know why you did. Please, just go home."

"I'm really, really trying," Steve insisted, and it sounded sincere. But Mike knew that Steve had been really, really trying for a while now, and Nancy was getting tired of waiting. "Nancy, please."

"Go. Home," Nancy said shortly. "We'll talk tomorrow. I want to go to bed." After a moment Mike heard the front door open and shut, and then the distant sound of a car engine starting. Slowly, he came out from behind the basement door. Nancy was on her way up the stairs to her room.

"Nancy," Mike found himself saying. He hadn't planned for this, but it was happening now. "Why do you stay with him?"

"What?" she responded with a frown. She had stopped in her tracks and was peering at him from over the railing on the landing.

He looked straight up at her. "Why do you stay with Steve?" he repeated. "It's obvious he makes you uncomfortable sometimes. Too often, probably. I don't get it."

"I don't even..." Nancy shook her head. "It's not a big deal, Mike. Go to bed. That's what I'm doing."

"What did he say?" Mike pressed. "I heard you. He said something

mean. Again. And he told you he's really trying. Except if what you've told me is anything to go by, he's been really trying for a while and nothing has changed. Why do you bother?"

She opened her mouth slowly, her frown deepening, and then shook her head again and turned around. "I don't want to talk about this with you."

"I know how you feel about Jonathan," Mike blurted.

Nancy stopped in her tracks, then turned and came back down a few stairs to the landing again. "Excuse me?"

"I know how you feel about Jonathan," he repeated, standing his ground. He felt small arguing with her from here on the floor, but she was still taller than him anyway, so he decided not to break eye contact by climbing up the stairs after her. "So why Steve?"

"How I feel about Jonathan?" she sputtered, clearly incensed.

"Yeah. Definitely," he answered, trying to keep his voice level. "I mean, it's obvious, when you talk about him. You told me the whole story, everything from the photos to when you spotted the demogorgon in the one of Barb to talking to him to eventually fighting the monster with him. The way you talk about him is really different from how you talk about Steve."

"Different *how*, exactly?" she demanded, still affronted by his accusations.

"Loads of ways," Mike challenged her. "Respectful. Admiring. You think he's nice, you think he cares about things. You felt bad for him right from when Will disappeared but you obviously started to like him a lot, even though you did argue about the photos and stuff. You got off on the wrong foot, but even by the end of that night your feelings had obviously changed. You said he makes you feel safe. I mean, you let him sleep in your *room*." She may have neglected to say that he'd slept in her *bed*, and she was glad of it now. Mike gestured at the door. "Steve, though... you always sound so tired when you talk about him. I mean, sometimes you have nice things to say. But they're mostly like, 'he's nice,' 'he's really trying,' 'he's a

good person deep down.' Who cares what he is deep down if he's never like that on the surface?"

"He's good on the surface all the time!" Nancy argued. "He's getting better!"

Mike shrugged. "It just seems like I've overheard a lot of bits of arguments like that one just now, and like I've heard a lot more things about how he's never quite succeeding at being what you want than about how he is."

"This is ridiculous," she said, throwing her hands in the air.

Mike's face went hard suddenly. "Eleven is gone."

The anger dissipated from Nancy's expression, replaced with confusion and sadness. "What – what does that have to do with it?" she asked.

"You should know," he told her, his tone angry now. "I might have lied to you the first time, but not the second. You know I asked her to go with me to the Snow Ball, you know how I..." He trailed off, unable to say it, wiping a sleeve across his wet eyes.

Nancy softened, hating to see her brother this way. "I know. I'm sorry."

"You should be!" he retorted. "You like Jonathan and you don't even really like Steve. But you're ignoring your feelings for no reason at all. You could have what you want but you don't." Nancy bit her lip, knowing where he was coming from, but he said it anyway, laying it all out on the table. "I can't follow my feelings at all." Finally he looked away from her, down at the floor, as he felt what seemed like the hundredth bout of tears rush forth.

Mike heard his sister's feet pad softly against the stairs and felt her wrap her arms around his shoulders, drawing him into a warm hug. Even if she was still upset with him she couldn't leave him alone with this grief. She knew how it felt and that outweighed everything else. After a moment he reached up and clutched the back of her sweater, crying into her shoulder.

Nancy rested a cheek against the top of her brother's head and held him. She hated him for making her face this. She thought about how much he loved Eleven after only days, a sort of love she imagined was only possible when you were still a kid and had so many fewer inhibitions in the way of it. It was strange how enormous the few years' gap between them seemed. Mike had adored Eleven. He probably wasn't in love with her, Nancy thought; it probably wasn't quite so nuanced, so deep, and yet... in some ways, she thought, it was a healthier and better love than plenty she'd witnessed in high school. Mike and Eleven had known each other on the deepest and most important levels. They had listened to one another and protected each other from things far bigger and scarier than any adult should have to deal with, let alone child.

For that matter, that was true of Nancy and Jonathan, too. They had come to know each other on a base level, one of basic survival and, to be frank, revenge. They had worked together, protected each other, listened and confided. Jonathan didn't know her favourite colours or actors or music like Steve did, but he knew how she thought, how she fought, and the lengths to which she'd go to protect her loved ones. He knew she was a great shot. He had stood back-to-back with her and trusted her to help him kill a monster. And she had trusted him in the same. She couldn't say as much for Steve, even if he'd gotten himself involved in the same fight. She had to admit that if it had been Steve helping her set bear traps and plan out how to set an otherworldly monster on fire, it would not have worked out so well.

Maybe a few days was all it took to find a boy you liked a lot better than the boyfriend you've crushed on for months, if the circumstances were just right – or just dire enough.

Mike was calming down, and extracted himself from her shoulder. "I'm sorry," he breathed.

"Me too," she answered, still mostly lost in thought as she planted a very soft kiss on the top of his head.

"Gross," he teased, half-heartedly pushing her away.

"Yeah, I know," she answered. "Come on. We both need to get to

bed.”